

Region 8 Electronics Certification Frequently Asked Questions

Q: Can I get a list of US EPA certified electronics recyclers?

A: US EPA does not certify electronics equipment recyclers. Some recyclers may, however, advertise as themselves as being “US EPA Approved” or “US EPA Certified” in regard to their recycling activities. These claims are not accurate.

Recyclers may have permits for managing certain types of wastes from the US EPA, or state governments. These permits are not US EPA certifications. Having a permit does not reflect how the company recycles electronic equipment, but instead indicates that they have identified their facility as subject to regulatory requirements that require a permit (e.g., air emissions or water discharges). A permit does not guarantee the quality of their recycling methods. Depending on what processes the recycler uses and where their operations are located, many recyclers will not conduct activities that require them to have a permit.

A US EPA ID number is also not a certification. The Resource Conservation and Recovery Act (RCRA) requires any person who generates, transports, or recycles regulated wastes or who owns or operates a facility for the treatment, storage, or disposal of regulated wastes (i.e., hazardous waste) to notify US EPA of their activities, including the location and general description of the activities and the regulated wastes handled. US EPA assigns EPA Identification Number to these companies. US EPA uses the number to track the handling of the waste from the generator to treatment or disposal facilities. The Identification Number also allows US EPA to track its permit and compliance status. Due to the diverse processes and the type of equipment, not all electronic recyclers are required to have an US EPA ID number.

Q: An electronics recycler gave me a number that they said was their ‘US EPA number’. What does this number mean?

A: As stated above, US EPA assigns an EPA Waste Generator Identification Number to companies that handle hazardous waste. This number is used to track wastes from one generator to another, and is not a permit, certification, or any kind of US EPA approval of their activities. It is instead a way to track waste as it moves from one entity to another. For more information on Waste Generator Identification Numbers, visit: <http://www.epa.gov/region09/waste/epanums.html>.

Q: Does US EPA have information that could help me decide on an electronic recycler to use?

A: Yes. We have a few documents that might be helpful in selecting a recycler to use.

Though US EPA does not have “approved methods” for electronic recyclers, we do encourage safe recycling practices. To this end, we have issued voluntary *Guidelines for Material Management* under our Plug-In to eCycling Program. This guide encourages anyone who handles used electronic equipment to:

- Maximize the reuse, refurbishment, and recycling hierarchy;
- Take precautions to reduce emissions and exposures to workers and the environment;
- Provide special handling of components which may contain substances of concern;
- Ensure that exported electronic products are being sent for legitimate reuse, recycling or refurbishment; and
- Ensure that collection, recycling and refurbishing, and disposal facilities follow management practices that are consistent with the guidelines.

This *Guide* can be found at: www.epa.gov/epaoswer/osw/conservation/plugin/pdf/guide.pdf. The reader could ask the recycler if they have reviewed this guide and if they follow the practices detailed in it.

In addition, US EPA has developed recycling audit tools to be used by the Federal government to determine which electronic equipment recyclers to use. These tools can be found at: <http://www.federalelectronicchallenge.net/resources/eolmngt.htm>. Among the tools provided is a “*Checklist for the Selection of Electronics Reuse and Recycling Services*” which can serve as a guide in selecting a recycler. This guide can also help the user of electronics recycling services make an informed choice regarding their electronics recycling needs.

Both of these resources provide information about what questions to ask when evaluating recyclers. It’s important to remember that each recycler may follow different processes, and you will need to decide which electronics recycler will do the job you need done, offer the services you need, and minimize your environmental and informational liability at an acceptable cost. Remember, the lowest cost does not always represent the best value.

Q: Where can I get a list of electronic recyclers?

A: For a list of recyclers you may want to check with your state agency that deals with recycling, such as the state EPA, DNR, DEQ, or Department of Commerce. If you are a homeowner you may want to check with your local municipality or solid waste district to learn if they have electronics collection programs or events. The Electronic Industries Alliance (www.eiae.org/) and the website www.earth911.org, identifies electronic equipment recyclers in many areas around the country. Also, many of the electronic manufacturers offer recycling free or for a fee, visit their websites for information about programs that they may offer.

Q: Will US EPA have a certification standard for electronics recyclers in the future?

A: US EPA is currently (mid-2006) working with a group of interested electronic equipment stakeholders (i.e., states, e-manufacturers, e-recyclers and public interest groups) to develop a credible and voluntary certification program that helps assure environmental performance of electronic recyclers. This certification program is expected to be run by third party organizations. More information on this program will be available in the coming months.

Q: Are there other certifications that an electronic recycler might have?

A: Yes, there are currently several certification programs for e-recyclers - some are specific to electronics, and others provide more general environmental assurances.

These include:

- International Association of Electronic Recyclers (IAER) IAER certification; and
- Institute of Scrap Recycling Industry's (ISRI) Recycling Industry Operating Standards (RIOS) certification.

A recycler may voluntarily achieve any of these certifications. Please note, however, that if an electronics recycler does not have one of these certifications, it does not necessarily mean that they do not recycle electronics in a safe and environmentally sound way. Certification is a rigorous and sometimes expensive process that not all companies will choose to pursue. In addition, if a recycler is certified, you should still ask questions about the recycler's processes and services to make an informed decision about whether your electronic equipment will be handled in an environmentally sound manner.

You can find out more information on the certifications above at:

- IAER - <http://www.iaer.org/communications/certification.htm>
- ISRI's RIOS - <http://www.isri.org/AM/Template.cfm?Section=RIOS1&Template=/TaggedPage/TaggedPageDisplay.cfm&TPLID=110&ContentID=6889>

Q: What are the environmental benefits of reusing and recycling e-waste?

A: Reusing and recycling electronic waste helps use materials wisely, saves energy, and keeps useable and valuable material out of landfills and incinerators. Electronic products are made from valuable resources, such as precious and other metals, plastics, and glass, all of which require energy to mine and manufacture them. Reusing and recycling these materials from end-of-life electronics conserves our natural resources and avoids air and water pollution, as well as greenhouse gas emissions that are caused by manufacturing new products.

Q: Are there organizations that reuse electronic equipment?

A: Yes. If your computer is less than 5 years old, consider donating it to be used by others. Often reusing and refurbishing electronic equipment is part of a recycler's core business, while other organizations make it their entire business to refurbish/ update computers for reuse. When deciding on an organization to donate your computer to, you may want to inquire about their reuse/refurbishment practices.

The website www.techsoup.org/recycle/donate can help you identify organizations that refurbish computer equipment for reuse

Q: What should I consider when donating my computer for reuse?

A: There are many options for donating computers today. There are, however, a few questions that you may want to ask before donating your used equipment.

- Is the computer fairly new? If it is too old, (5 years or older) it may not be able to run the same software that other computers do.
- Will the recipient be able to use it, or refurbish it for use? If the equipment is too old, or requires repairs, it may not be economical to fix it for reuse. In this case, you might want to consider sending it to a recycler instead.

If, the answer to both questions is yes, then you should also consider if your computer has any sensitive personal or business information on it that needs to be cleansed before donating. If so, you can request that the receiving organization remove the data, or you could remove it yourself. For more information on donating computers and clearing data from computer equipment, please visit the website www.epa.gov/plugin, look for the document, *Do the PC Thing for Consumers* and or *Do the PC Thing for Businesses*.

For additional information on computer reuse or refurbishment, you may want to visit websites such as US EPA's reuse page at www.epa.gov/plugin; TechSoup at www.techsoup.org, or the Indiana Recycling Coalition's eScrap Reuse – Best Practices in Reuse Page at <http://www.esrapindiana.org/pdfs/bestprac/BPinReuse.pdf>

Q: I am interested in donating my cell phone. Are there any organizations that collect, reuse and/or recycle cell phones?

A: In the cell phone industry, there are a lot of opportunities for consumers to recycle used cell phones. Many of the major manufacturers and network providers sponsor on going cell phone collections and events. These organizations accept cell phone donations regardless of age or brand.

The used phones are typically, triaged and divided into "good", "bad", and "ugly". In most instances, the "good" phones are resold as is or broken down into parts for re-sale, the "bad" phones are either fixed or used as parts, and the "ugly" phones are sent to the recycler to be smelted down into raw materials.

Each collection program is different: the proceeds of the collection programs benefit charitable organizations (i.e., domestic violence); other programs work with schools and other organizations to raise funds; while still other programs provide cash back to the consumer that donates the phone. For more information on where to recycle your phone, please check cell phone manufacturers and network carriers web sites.

Q: What are the benefits of reusing and recycling cell phones?

- Extends the lifetime of the phone and diverts waste from landfills
- Reduces the need for raw materials to make new products
- Helps charitable organizations through fundraising opportunities
- Provides communication services to those who cannot afford new phones or need emergency services

Q: Is there anything I should consider before donating my cell phone for reuse?

A: Yes. Prior to donating or recycling used cell phones, you should make sure you have terminated your service contract for the phone and erased any personal or sensitive data that you stored on your phone.

In order to ensure that stored information is cleaned from the phone before donation, the following things are recommended:

- Manually delete all information.
- Follow instructions in product manual for how to conduct a factory hard reset, or contact your local phone store for instructions.

Another option is to use data erasing tools which are available on the web. For more information on clearing data from your cell phone, please visit the website <http://www.wirelessrecycling.com>, look for phone data eraser.

Q: If I still have a question who should I speak with?

A: Please contact: Kim Bartels
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